

Gaidischar, Johannes (Ivan) Adamovich (b. 1886)

DMITRY O. YUNAK

Dmitry O. Yunak graduated in Finance and Economics from a Soviet secular educational institution and completed a six-year course of Theology at an underground SDA Theological Institute (Moldova, USSR). In the Soviet times, he served as a pastor, administrator, and bible/history professor in the underground Theological Institute. In 1990, he was appointed as Treasurer and Publishing Ministries Director for the USSR Division. After the Euro-Asia Division was organized in 1991, Dmitry O. Yunak served as ESD auditor and under treasurer. He was the author of a dozen of SDA history books and scores of other publications. He owns a major SDA history archive.



Johannes Gaidischar, 1910.

Photo courtesy of D.O. Yunak.

Johannes (Ivan) Adamovich Gaidischar was a pastor, evangelist, writer, and martyr for Christ. He worked in Russia, Siberia, and Kazakhstan in the 1900s.

Early Life

Johannes Gaidischar was born in St. Petersburg on July 4, 1886. His father, Adam Gaidischar, was a Czech Catholic who married a Lutheran German woman. The Gaidischars spoke German at home. Adam Gaidischar was a tinsmith, and his wife worked at a linen workshop as a shirt maker.¹

Subsequently things became challenging for the Gaidischars when they lost their father Adam Gaidischar. Not long after, Mrs. Gaidischar and her children became Seventh-day Adventists.

Education

Having learned that there was an Adventist Mission Seminary in Germany, Adam Gaidischar's widow did her best to have her son Johannes enrolled at Friedensau. Johannes enrolled at the Adventist Mission Seminary in

Friedensau on September 1, 1909, two months after his brother Fyodor (Ferdinand) had graduated from the Seminary. Two years later, on July 17, 1911, after the completion of his studies at Friedensau, Johannes returned to St. Petersburg. There he helped to establish a Youth Club at his local church in Petrograd. It was during this time that he dedicated one of his poems, perhaps the first, to the creation of this Youth Club.

Early Ministry and Marriage

Around July 30, 1912, Gaidischar married Marie Achtziger from the region of Archeda in today's Volgograd Oblast (on the Volga River). They had earlier met at Friedensau. Nevertheless, it was not until July 30, 1912 that Marie finished her studies and returned to Saratov. Since Gaidischar was already a minister in the city of Simbirsk, they married in Saratov where he continued his ministry.

An interesting detail concerning the early ministry of Johannes and Marie Gaidischar was that they were blessed with children in the respective places they ministered. Starting with Saratov, the young couple had their first child, named Vladimir, in 1913. When they moved to Siberia, Marie gave birth to a baby girl in 1915. She was named Lidia. In 1916, when they were called to minister in Harbin (former Manchuria), the Gaiditschars welcomed another baby boy into their family whom they named Leo (Lev). And when Johannes and his family were ministering in the town of Bikin in the Far East, Viktor, their third boy, was born in 1920.

Ministry and Challenges

In 1920 Gaidischar served in an Adventist congregation at the Bikin station in the Far East. In the same year, he was ordained in Siberia.² Meanwhile, the Far-Eastern Republic became an independent country that served as a buffer zone between Russia and Japan. By that time, a congregation in Harbin and the Far-Eastern churches had been reorganized as independent mission field attached to the Far-Eastern Division.³

The Gaidischars started facing persecution as soon they were sent to minister in Vladivostok. Gaidischar was arrested and exiled to Irkutsk in eastern Siberia, Russia.⁴ As a result, he spent more than one and a half years in exile. At the end of his exile in Irkutsk, Gaidischar continued his pastoral ministry in Khabarovsk (a city along in the Amur River in Russia). It was here in 1923 that their fourth son, Alexander, was born.⁵

The independent mission fields in the Far East were returned to the All-Russia Federation of Societies of Seventh-day Adventists in 1925. This happened at a session of the Far Eastern Union Mission held in Khabarovsk; however, the Harbin church was not returned. It was in this session of 1925 where Gaidischar was asked to move to the Altai region. Before this time, Gaidischar was the minister overseeing the churches of the Far Eastern Mission: Vladivostok Khabarovsk, Blagoveschensk, and Bikin stations. Some details can be gleaned from the 1925 session concerning the life and working conditions of some Adventist ministers. The year when Gaidischar was moved to Altai, there was a decision made to grant his family some financial assistance: "to

allocate 100 Rubles, from the church cash account, in financial assistance to I. A. Gaidischar for tailoring repairs.”⁶

Conference President

Gaidischar not only prospered as a pastor, he was also a successful writer. Old Adventist magazines bear evidence of his poems. These magazines also reveal many articles written by Gaidischar.⁷ Thus, he combined his pastoral ministry with writing for the benefit of the church.

At the end of 1925, Gaidischar was elected as president of the Irtysh Conference. This conference was also responsible for the Adventist congregations in the territory of Eastern Siberia and Eastern Kazakhstan. However, this position lasted for just two years. In February 1928, there was a reorganization of the Irtysh Conference. During the reorganization, the Russian territories were separated and added to the Eastern Siberian and Omsk Mission Fields. However, there was an issue involving members who lived in the high mountains and could only be reached by horse. To solve this, the churches of Eastern Kazakhstan were organized as the Upper Irtysh Conference with a center in Semipalatinsk. Gaidischar was made president of this region.⁸

Hardship, Arrest, and Martyrdom

Gaidischar's ministry in the territory of Eastern Kazakhstan was faced with difficulties. From the economic side, he tried to make ends meet by working as a paramedic in an orphanage home. On August 20, 1937, he was arrested. During his arrest, all photographs that had anything to do with his ministry, including the sessions where he served as delegate, were confiscated. When Marie, his wife, tried to get in touch with her incarcerated husband, she was told by the officials of the Russian NKVD (People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs) that he was sentenced to ten years in exile at a faraway labor camp and not allowed communication with the outside world.

The response given to Marie was the standard reaction of the government. Usually this response was given to the relatives of a prisoner who must have been killed or buried alive. The ones who were buried alive were those who got weak or ill while digging graves for mass burials. If they were not able to get out of the deep graves, they were buried under the piles of dead bodies. Such was the tragedy that must have befallen Johannes Gaidischar as a minister in the time of repression in Eastern Kazakhstan.

Contribution

Johannes Gaidischar was key in the establishment and organization of the Seventh-day Adventist church in some of the regions of the Far East where he worked. As an administrator, he oversaw the spiritual needs of scattered Adventists in the remote areas of Russia, Siberia, and Kazakhstan. As a poet and regular contributor to the Adventist magazines, he was influential in strengthening the faith of Adventists during a time of oppression

and difficulty. He died an Adventist martyr.

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NOTES

1. Elvira I. Gaidischar, "Vospominaniya El'viry I. Gaydichar, docheri I. A. Gaydichara" [Memoirs of Elvira I. Gaidischar, I.A. Gaidischar's Daughter], personal archives of Dmitry Yunak.
2. "Conditions in East Siberian Union," *Asiatic Division Outlook*, December 1 and 15, 1921, 6.

3. Dmitry O. Yunak. "Oblako svideteley. Rukovoditeli Tserkvi ASD v Rossii ot organizatsii yeyo pervoy obshchiny do zakrytiya VSASD," unpublished manuscript, 2013, 202-203.
4. L. H. Christian, "Deported to the Interior," *General Conference Bulletin*, May 25, 1922, 267-268.
5. Alexander had a short life. On September 6, 1943, he died at the age of 20 while fighting as a sub lieutenant in the Second World War.
6. Archive of the Church Seventh-day Adventists in Russia, "Reports of Meetings of the Board of the AACCS, 1920-1930," sheet 82, August 21-26, 1925, 31.
7. Prilozheniye k zhurnalu Maslina June 1912, Zhurnal Golos Istiny, August and September, 1927.
8. This position put him closer to leadership of the Siberian Union. In 1927, Gaidischar was elected as a delegate to a session of the Siberian Union serving as member of the Siberian Union council. In 1928 he was a delegate to the 6th All-Union session in Moscow. In one of the meetings, it is noted that he preached a sermon titled "Christ our Saviour." He was included in the list of delegates for the December administrative session of 1931 that was held in Moscow. However, none of the Siberian delegates were present in that meeting. It was probably because of the poor transportation system at that time, especially during the winter seasons. The session of 1931 was the last Adventist forum where all the administrators of the SDA Church could have met before the start of massive repressions. They never met together in such a capacity in the time of the repressions. Interestingly, also in 1931 the family of Johannes and Marie Gaiditschar welcomed a daughter, Elvira. Elvira is still alive today. Together with her daughter Lidia, she lives in a city of Angarsk. Both are members the local Adventist congregation.

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